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LORD WOLSELEY ANSWERED.

BY GENERAL JAMES B. FRY.

LORD WOLSELEY's comments upon the Civil War should be read in the light of the fact, announced in his fourth article, that they are based entirely upon the accounts given in the book called "Battles and Leaders of the Civil War."

That remarkable work is a record of what the principal actors on both sides of a great war said of their own deeds some twenty years after the contest. It is hardly necessary to mention that such a record is fallible, as well as valuable. The "War Book" is not a history of the Civil War. On the other hand, it is not merely a compilation of careless fireside stories of old soldiers in retirement. It is a record of the deliberate testimony of the principal witnesses in a great trial of arms, given to the world with the soldier's certificate of honor, and set down under the advice and guidance of counsel. Mr. Johnson and Mr. Buel, the editors under whom the "War Book" was prepared, soon became, if they were not in the beginning, experts in matters of the Civil War, and were, in fact, able and impartial counsel for their contributors. The articles were written and published in good faith, but they are *ex parte*, not all correct, and not conclusive. The work is without a parallel, and is of the greatest value and interest; but just criticism of the Civil War calls for a full consideration of all the evidence, the general accounts of the period, diaries, memoirs, etc., and especially the official records,—the testimony which the "War Book" witnesses and others gave at the time.

Lord Wolseley's purpose is to draw military lessons for his own people, and for that the "War Book" may be sufficient. A military lesson may be deduced from an assumed or an established case; but reputations can be fairly dealt with only in the latter. The facts should be collected from all quarters before actors, whether civil or military, in the field or in the bureau, are

convicted. While Lord Wolseley will not dispute this principle, he has not adhered rigidly to it.

For example, his condemnation of Halleck is unsparing ; he blames him for conveying to Meade the President's displeasure at the failure to pursue Lee vigorously ; and, without any knowledge of what Halleck did say, condemns him for not saying to the President certain brave things, which he now thinks Halleck ought to have said ; and taunts him by adding : “ What pursuit had Halleck carried out after Shiloh ? Of all men in the war, Halleck was the last who ought to have reproached another man for not adequately reaping the fruits of victory.”

The truth is, Halleck had nothing to do with the battle of Shiloh or the pursuit which was not carried out. That was in Grant’s hands. Halleck was at St. Louis, hundreds of miles away, when the battle was fought, and did not reach the field for nearly a week after the fight was over and the enemy was within his lines at Corinth.

Without undertaking to present Halleck’s case, it is only fair to note that he was dead long before the “ *Century War Book* ” was thought of ; and that there is nothing in that book which was written in his behalf. As Lord Wolseley’s criticisms of him are based wholly upon that authority, his Lordship has in this instance condemned a fellow-soldier without a hearing. Lord Wolseley says : “ No one who has himself realized the practical difficulties of command in the field is much inclined to any slap-dash criticism of those who are engaged in high command.” It would be hard to find a more striking example of the “ *slap-dash criticism*, ” which Lord Wolseley disclaims, than his treatment of Halleck presents.

It must, I think, be admitted that Lord Wolseley’s military criticisms upon the war, *as he sees it through the Century articles*, are, in general, sound ; and in presenting them he has made an interesting contribution to the profession. It is a merit in his work that he recognizes and sets forth the influence of the navy upon the contest. While special feats of that branch of the service have been chronicled and duly credited, the public mind has never fully taken in the real effect of the navy’s part upon joint operations, upon the glory of particular generals, and upon the final result of the contest. Lord Wolseley has rendered an important service in giving prominence to this point.

The one great lesson which Lord Wolseley sees in our Civil War is that civil rulers should not meddle in military affairs.

"It is the old, old story over again," he says, "of civil rulers who blunder, and, failing to foresee events, sacrifice everything to a momentary popularity, in order to divert popular wrath from themselves to the unfortunate soldiers who have been their victims." "The lesson which is most impressed upon me by a study of these campaigns is the danger there always is of popular irritability and ignorant impatience preventing a general from doing the very thing which would, if time were allowed, surely gain the ends which the people desire."

Is not this, in the free countries of Great Britain and the United States, complaining of the inevitable? "Let us clearly understand," Lord Wolseley says, "that the prisoner at the bar is 'Public Opinion,'" "that hoary-headed and cruel old rascal," who is "entirely ignorant," but who issues "decrees" upon which governments are compelled to act. That "prisoner" is not subject to military jurisdiction. Soldiers may bring him before courts-martial as a witness, but not as a prisoner. Is it worth while for them to spend time in England or the United States trying to sentence or silence him? That President Lincoln was "compelled to act" by the decrees of public opinion, and that he was forced to say to McClellan, "Once more let us tell you, it is indispensable to *you* that you strike a blow! I am powerless to help this," is quite true. The practical questions are, What should the soldier have done? What did he do under this "decree," whether the "ignorant old rascal, public opinion," ought to have issued the decree or not?

Lord Wolseley treats the subject as if the war was a strictly military question which could have been settled by one or two pitched battles if the military leaders had had their own way; and he seems to think they ought to have been permitted to decide how many soldiers their governments should raise, how much time should be spent in preparing them for the work in hand, and when, where, and how the work should be done. That is about the view General McClellan took of the subject. He proposed to take all the time he thought necessary for preparation and then, as he said, "crush the rebels in one campaign." But the war was not a technical or professional one. It was a civil war, a resort to arms upon a principle by the people of two sections of the country separated practically by the slave-line, without an army on either side at the beginning. No battle, or two or three battles, however great or how-

ever decisive as mere feats of arms, could have greatly hastened the result. The questions at issue, the character and relations to each other of the people engaged, and the vast extent and natural features and resources of the South enforced upon the North a war of exhaustion and occupation. There were about twenty-three millions of whites in the North, to about five millions in the South ; but the productive interests of the South were cared for by a thoroughly-organized, well-trained, and efficient labor system composed of about three millions and a half of docile blacks born to slavery and brought up to work, males and females alike, in the field or elsewhere at the will of their masters. Assuming, as I do, that the North was bound to succeed, conquest and occupation were inevitable. That required time, and imposed upon the North what Lord Wolseley speaks of as the "continued and systematic process of attrition applied by the Northern generals." This process of "attrition" was not a form of generalship which the Northern commanders were at liberty to accept or reject. It was a condition of things to which Northern generals were obliged to apply the art of war.

Speaking of the organization of the Army of the Potomac by McClellan, Lord Wolseley says :

"That most cruel tyrant, the 'public,' had no means of realizing the difficulties to be overcome. . . . As the months of 1862 went by, the universal feeling was one of restlessness and impatience at what was deemed the waste of time and the useless delay which were taking place. Under this impression, and under the force which this so-formed Public Opinion was exciting, the administration at Washington found itself forced to act."

This was a condition of things for the military leader in a republic to respect, not to resent. McClellan at first knew that, but soon after he reached Washington and took command he seemed to forget that he was a subordinate general of the Republic, and to become completely dominated by the belief that he had been chosen by Providence as the saviour of his country. That was fatal to him. He reached Washington July 26, an able, energetic, trusted young general. By October Washington was quite well fortified, and a great army, organized, armed, equipped, and fairly well drilled,—outnumbering the enemy two or three to one—rested behind its line of intrenchments. The offensive was demanded from all quarters and in all ways, soldiers as well as civilians making the demand. McClellan would not move. He

remained stationary until the enemy, to whom he was vastly superior in numbers and preparation, moved off in February.

So, too, notwithstanding the "decrees," did McClellan have his own way in the plan of campaign. The President advocated the direct overland route; McClellan the Peninsula route. The latter was adopted, the campaign failed, and Lord Wolseley says Mr. Lincoln "wrecked an ably-devised plan for the advance upon Richmond of all the available Federal forces by one single line," etc.

The Peninsula campaign failed on account of delays arising from natural obstacles and because McClellan did not handle his army to advantage. Upon any line adopted he was sure to find the main Confederate army between him and Richmond. The movement to the Peninsula necessarily divided his own forces and concentrated those of the enemy, and in the end he was forced against intrenchments quite as formidable as those he dreaded at Manassas. The Peninsula line, however, was a true one. It afforded two immediate objectives—the rebel army and the rebel capital. Furthermore, it enabled the coöperation of the navy and required but a short line of supply, about twelve miles by railroad.

It cannot be said to a certainty that the detention of McDowell's corps by the President did or did not prevent McClellan's success on the Peninsula; but it must be borne in mind that Franklin's division of McDowell's corps was, at McClellan's urgent request, sent to him after only a week's delay, and McCall's division of that corps was sent to him and arrived while he was on the Chickahominy; thus giving him the best two-thirds of McDowell's corps, before the enemy drove him to the James River.

McClellan himself practically admits that the detention of troops for the security of Washington was not the cause of his failure, by giving in his "own story," long after the war, a specific and different cause. It is this: On May 18 the Secretary of War addressed a letter to McClellan in reply to a call for McDowell's corps to be sent by water, in which the Secretary said:

"The President is not willing to uncover the capital entirely, and it is believed that, even if this were prudent, it would require more time to effect a junction between your army and that of the Rappahannock by way of the Potomac and York rivers than by a land march. In order, therefore, to increase the strength of the attack upon Richmond at the earliest moment, General McDowell has been ordered to march upon that city by the shortest route. He is ordered, keeping himself always

in position to save the capital from all possible attack, so to operate as to put his left wing in communication with your right wing, and you are instructed to co-operate so as to establish this communication as soon as possible, by extending your right wing to the north of Richmond."

McClellan says in his own story:

"This order rendered it impossible for me to use the James River as a line of operations, forced me to establish our depots on the Pamunky and to approach Richmond from the north. Herein lay the failure of the campaign. As it was impossible to get at Richmond and the enemy's army covering it without crossing the Chickahominy, I was obliged to divide the Army of the Potomac into two parts separated by that river."

There is the cause of his failure clearly and deliberately stated by McClellan himself long after the war. It refutes the charge that the detention of troops for the safety of Washington was the cause. But, strange to say, McClellan's statement that he was forced by Stanton's letter of May 18 to establish his depots on the Pamunky, etc., is erroneous. Lord Wolseley has accepted the foregoing statement from McClellan and says of Stanton :

"It was he who thrust forward the force under McDowell, and so entailed upon McClellan the necessity of placing himself in that false position astride of the Chickahominy which led to all the misfortunes of this campaign."

The facts of record are that McClellan had established his depots on the Pamunky before Stanton's telegram of May 18 was sent. He had taken locomotives and cars in his transports for the purpose of using the railroad from White House to Richmond as his line of operations. He arrived in person at White House on May 16, having then passed the last point at which he could turn towards the James River, and wrote to his wife, May 17, "We expect to have our advance parties near Bottom's bridge today," said all the bridges were burned, but that "this river is fordable, so the difficulty is not insurmountable by any means"; showing that he intended to encounter the Chickahominy, but did not expect it to be a serious obstacle. On the 18th of May he wrote: "We will go to Tunnstall's or perhaps a little beyond it, and will soon close up on the Chickahominy, and find out what Secesh is doing. I think he will fight us *there, or between there and Richmond.*" Here was McClellan, with his depots on the Pamunky and his troops on the Chickahominy, expecting a battle "*between there and Richmond,*" before the letter of May 18, which, he says, forced him to the Pamunky and Chickahominy, was written. It is not only true that he was there without orders from Washington, but it is also true that before leaving Washing-

ton he intended to go there. In a report to the Secretary of War, dated March 19, he said :

"I have the honor to submit the following notes on the proposed operations of the active portion of the Army of the Potomac. The proposed plan of campaign is to assume Fort Monroe as the first base of operations, *taking the line of Yorktown and West Point upon Richmond as the line of operations*, Richmond being the objective point. It is assumed that the fall of Richmond involves that of Norfolk and the whole of Virginia; *also that we shall fight a decisive battle between West Point and Richmond*. It is also clear that *West Point should, as soon as possible, be reached and used as our main depot*."

There the objective, the base, the main depot, and the line of operations—upon which he expected to fight a decisive battle "between West Point and Richmond"—are laid down with mathematical and soldierly accuracy by McClellan himself before leaving Washington, and he indicated no purpose to change the base, depot, or line until the enemy turned his right flank late in June. To this it might be added that there is nothing to show that McClellan, at the time, or when giving his testimony to the Committee on the Conduct of the War concerning the cause of failure, asserted or pretended that he was forced to the Pamunkey and Chickahominy, or that he had any objection to that base and line. Instead, therefore, of being forced to that "false position astride of the Chickahominy" by Stanton's letter of May 18, the position was deliberately assumed upon McClellan's own judgment.

Lord Wolseley says :

'The one just defence which McClellan is able to offer for the dangerous division of his army astride the Chickahominy is that, according to his statement,—and it is undisputed,—that distribution of his troops was expressly ordered from Washington, the object being that he might keep in communication with the force under McDowell.'

Having proved, as I think, that McClellan himself chose his base, his depot, and his line of operations, and placed himself upon the Chickahominy before the order of May 18 was issued (which is relied upon wholly as the order of the Washington authorities in the case), and it being the fact that he promptly put his army astride the Chickahominy on May 20 by his own orders, it seems unnecessary to say more upon that point. The case does not sustain Lord Wolseley's lesson against governmental interference with generals in the field, or the assertion that Lincoln wrecked McClellan's ably-devised campaign.

Lord Wolseley speaks with proper commendation of the Confederate attack upon McClellan's left, called the battle of Seven

Pines, and remarks, very justly : "All that failed was the execution." He says : "The moment selected for the attack was happily chosen immediately after the river had risen in sudden flood." While this statement concerning the time chosen is not to be contradicted, it calls, on historical grounds, for some qualification. When Johnston ordered the attack on April 30, the Chickahominy was high, but McClellan had several bridges by which he could cross to support his left wing. During the night of the 30th-31st, *after the attack had been ordered*, the rain fell in torrents, thus swelling the stream so that bridges were swept away next day, and the Union left was greatly imperilled. Lord Wolseley says:

"General Longstreet's division was so long in getting into position and preparing for attack that the whole scheme of General J. E. Johnston miscarried;" and elsewhere : "Nothing could have enabled the Federal forces to the north of the Chickahominy to arrive in time to support the left, or the left to escape over the Chickahominy, if the Confederate corps had taken their proper directions."

This conclusion may be questioned. The Federal forces north of the Chickahominy would have moved to the support of the left as soon as they received notice of the attack, just as they did move at 2 P.M., and if the attack had been made as early as intended, the Federals would have had one more bridge to cross upon, and roads less rain-soaked to move over. The failure probably was not due to the time of the attack or the time of the arrival of supports for the Federal left. It is attributable to the fact that Longstreet's division was not brought to bear upon Keyes's right flank—the weak part of the line.

Two main roads, the Williamsburg road and the Nine-Mile road, lying at safe and convenient distances apart, led from the Confederate camp, and intersected at the point occupied by Keyes's right, thus enabling an easy concentration of the Confederates for attack. The Nine-Mile road led directly to the exposed Federal flank. When the attack was ordered (April 30), Longstreet's division was on the Nine-Mile road; and it was ordered to proceed to the attack by that road, while D. H. Hill's division was ordered to attack by the Williamsburg road, upon which it was lying. This would have concentrated a powerful force upon the Federals, bringing Longstreet upon their weakest point. But instead of proceeding by the Nine-Mile road, as directed, Longstreet marched his division across to the Williamsburg road and fell in behind Hill. That was the gravest fault in execution which marks the affair.

Lord Wolseley's picture of the military situation and the magical effect of McClellan's assumption of command after Pope's defeat is graphic and highly colored, but somewhat misleading. He speaks of the "abject panic," and says (of McClellan):

"As the disorganization of the army was directly attributable to his absence from it so his presence with it—hailed as it was by all ranks—was, of itself, sufficient to restore it to order and efficiency." "All at once he heard nothing around him but enthusiastic demands to be led forward to victory from the very men who, till he joined them, were only seeking safety in individual flight."

There is no good ground for the assertion that the "disorganization of the army was directly attributable" to McClellan's "absence from it"; but the main point for consideration here—which Lord Wolseley seems to have overlooked—is that the Army of the Potomac had not been defeated or disorganized in Pope's campaign. Only a little more than one corps of that army had been seriously engaged under Pope, and though that fraction had suffered heavily, it had lost neither spirit nor organization. The other corps of the Army of the Potomac were in good order, and had not been engaged since the seven-days' fight on the Peninsula, nearly two months before. They constituted the main body of the army which McClellan led forth with promptness and energy to battle with Lee, who was moving into Maryland. It was, in fact, McClellan's own army from the Peninsula, not Pope's army from Manassas.

At that time McClellan was himself. The lash of adversity had subdued the fancy that he was the chosen saviour, and left at work in him nothing but the general that he really was. On the 7th of September he wrote his wife: "The feeling of the government toward me, I am sure, is kind and trusting. I hope by God's blessing to justify the confidence they now repose in me, and will bury the past in oblivion." But as soon as the Battle of Antietam was over, ten days later (September 17), the saviour hallucination again took precedence, and he began to seek the suppression of the authorities set over him by his country, calling them "difficulties" in his path. On the 20th of September he wrote:

"I feel some little pride in having, with a beaten and demoralized army, defeated Lee so utterly and saved the North so completely. Since I left Washington Stanton has again asserted that I, not Pope, lost the battle of Manassas No. 2! I am tired of fighting against such disadvantages, and feel that it is now time for the country to come to my help and remove these difficulties from my path. I feel that I have done all that can be asked in twice saving the country. If I continue in its service I have

at least, the right to demand a guarantee that I shall not be interfered with. I know I cannot have that assurance as long as Stanton continues in the position of Secretary of War, and Halleck as General-in-Chief."

The subordinate general commanding in the field, who announced on the 7th the "kind feeling" and "great confidence" of the government, and "buried the past in oblivion," after two weeks of military success was again the Saviour of the Country, demanding the removal from his path of the Secretary of War and the General-in-Chief! The result was six weeks of exasperating and contentious delay on the Potomac, followed, a few days later, by his removal from command when on the march, at the time of all times that he ought not to have been removed or interfered with.

Lord Wolseley's comments upon the great operations of the last two years of the war, especially Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Vicksburg, and Gettysburg, are so meagre as to be disappointing.

He says that Stoneman's raid caused the "loss of the battle of Chancellorsville," adding: "The more one considers that battle, the more clear it becomes that it was the absence of the Federal cavalry which made possible Jackson's turning movement." His Lordship has not seized what seem to me to be the controlling facts. Stoneman's movement was a proper part of a good plan. It left Hooker enough cavalry under Pleasonton to serve as "eyes" for the army. If the presence of Stoneman's cavalry would have prevented the division of the enemy's forces,—Jackson making a fifteen-mile march around the Federal army,—Hooker ought to have been thankful that it was away. But, instead of beating Lee's army in detail, he devoted all his energy and four days to slipping out from between the two parts of it, doing them as little harm as practicable in getting away. "Fighting Joe" was demoralized. Why it was so is not to be discussed here; but the lesson of that battle, as I view the subject, is not that it was a blunder to send Stoneman's cavalry to break Lee's communications.

Lord Wolseley closes his fourth article by saying:

"The decisions from Washington and the criticisms from Washington, based upon the loose and rampant public opinion of the day, were in every instance wrong, and were disastrous to the cause of the Union"; and he warns "the survivors* of the

* Probably misprint, meaning successors.

administration "against "interference in the conduct of war—the most difficult of all arts—without any knowledge of its methods or of its principles."

Both the assertion and the admonition seem too broad. It is not to be admitted that the "decisions" and "criticisms" from Washington were "in every instance wrong, and were disastrous to the Union"; nor is it sound doctrine, as implied, that the government should be silent about military operations. Perhaps the rule should be for the administration to speak plainly and positively concerning the object and general scope of the campaign. After that, the discretion and individual responsibility of the general should not be curtailed by orders, nor should he be disturbed by perplexing advice. But popular governments do not always adhere to such rules; and departures from them, real or alleged, give rise to disputes in which there may be, and generally are, right and wrong on both sides.

The glory of military success goes to the general in the field; but in case of defeat the blame is likely to be thrown upon the home government, if it has given an order by which the general can claim that he was controlled or influenced. Yet failure may result from bad plans and from badly-executed good orders, as well as from bad orders. In the matter of the relative merit of the orders he issued and the way they were executed, Lincoln's record will bear the closest scrutiny. The subject is too extensive and too technical for more than a brief notice here. Lincoln's so-called wrecking of McClellan's plans has already been sketched.

Burnside succeeded McClellan at Warrentown, November 9, 1862. His career as commander of the Army of the Potomac ended with the disastrous affair of Fredericksburg, and he was removed January 25, 1863. It is unjust to charge Burnside's failure to Halleck, as Lord Wolseley does. Burnside's plan of campaign and plan of battle were his own. In his report to Halleck, dated December 17, 1863, he says:

"The fact that I decided to move from Warrentown on to this line, rather against the opinion of the President, Secretary, and yourself, and that you have left the whole management in my hands without giving me orders, makes me the more responsible, . . . The movement was made earlier than you expected, and after the President, Secretary, and yourself requested me not to be in haste."

Instead of resorting to this official report, made at the time by Burnside himself, sustaining the administration and Halleck, Lord Wolseley condemns them, and depicts Halleck as a military demagogue, upon a story told in the "Century War Book" by a

Confederate officer of a conversation he says he had with Burnside under a flag of truce, while sitting "on a log," "provided with crackers, cheese, sardines, and a bottle of brandy."

The case of Fredericksburg is a bad one for Lord Wolseley's lesson of non-interference with the general in the field. Chancellorsville is not much better. Burnside was replaced by Hooker January 25, 1863. The next day Lincoln wrote Hooker a remarkable letter, in which he said :

"Only those generals who gain successes can set up dictators. What I now ask of you is military success, and I will risk the dictatorship. . . . Beware of rashness, but with energy and sleepless vigilance go forward and give us victories."

Hooker made his own plans, took the initiative, turned Lee's left, drew him out of his stronghold on the heights of Fredericksburg, and, with advantage of position and two men to the enemy's one, stole back to his camp without really fighting a battle.

Hooker was succeeded by Meade, who won the battle of Gettysburg. Lincoln knew that by the successes at Vicksburg and Gettysburg the contest was practically decided in our favor, and he desired a vigorous pursuit. On the 6th of July he expressed himself accordingly to Halleck. Undoubtedly Lincoln's action is in the nature of interference with the general in the field, but there was nothing "disastrous to the Union" in it.

When by the 16th of October (1863) nothing had been accomplished by Meade since the battle of Gettysburg, Lincoln wrote Halleck:

"If General Meade can now attack him [Lee] on a field no more than equal for us, and will do so with all the skill and courage which he, his officers and men possess, the honor will be his if he succeeds, and the blame may be mine if he fails."

If this was interference, it was of a manly kind. Nothing came of it.

Soon after this Grant assumed general control of all military operations, and personal supervision in Virginia. I have never seen it stated that he was unduly interfered with.

It cannot be disputed that there was some interference with military operations by the Washington authorities, due partly to popular clamor. In my judgment, however, it was not so frequent or so injurious as represented, and, good or bad, the advice given was sometimes unavoidable, because it was asked for.

Burnside was so communicative that Halleck found it necessary to telegraph him (December 10, 1863): "I beg you not to

telegraph details of your plans, nor the time of your intended movements. No secret can be kept that passes through so many hands." It was in response to a despatch from Hooker, sent when Lee was moving from his front for the Gettysburg campaign, that Lincoln advised—wisely, I think—against crossing the Rappahannock to attack the Confederate rear-guard. Lord Wolseley says of this incident:

"The mere suggestion by Hooker that to attack Lee's right was the proper course to pursue was sufficient to cause the removal of that general from his command."

This is incorrect and unjust. No penalty was imposed upon Hooker for the suggestion to attack Lee's right, except the clear exposition by Lincoln of the folly of such a movement. His removal was determined upon long before the suggestion was made. Special causes delayed it some weeks. Late in June, Hooker applied to be relieved, and his application was promptly granted June 28, the cause being the unfitness he had shown at Chancellorsville.

Time only can test the correctness of Lord Wolseley's prediction that for "most of the misfortunes experienced by the Federal troops, the verdict of history will ultimately hold responsible the administration at Washington rather than the generals who commanded in the field." I do not believe it. His conclusion (whether consistent or not with his prediction) that "amid the crowds of able men, of gallant soldiers, and of clever statesmen whom the epoch of the American Civil War produced, the two men Abraham Lincoln and Robert Lee stand out a head and shoulders above all others," may be contested as to Lee, but never as to Lincoln.

JAMES B. FRY.